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MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

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WHY CHINA MATTERS: IS THERE AN IMMINENT THREAT

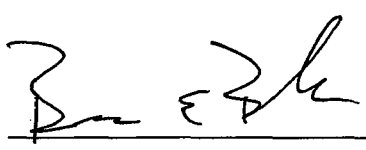
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
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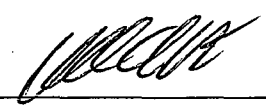
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
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## PREFACE

Before I attended law school at the University of Miami, I had originally been accepted to Georgetown University's joint Juris Doctor and Master of Science in Foreign Service program. My interests at the time had always been centered on international affairs. Before leaving active duty, I sought the counsel of Brigadier General John Rutherford Allen – then Col. Allen, my commanding officer – to help determine which school to attend, and among our talks were many foreign affairs issues. That was 2001 and the first time I heard anything about a rising China. I had paid little attention to the 1996 Taiwan crisis and other sensitive incidents. I was alarmed about something I did not know. The United States had better solidify relations with her hemispheric neighbors and its hegemonic status in the Americas, because China would be the hegemonic power in the east.

By the time Richard Bernstein and Ross Munro wrote *The Coming Conflict with China*, China was more than a possible threat to the U.S. A string of new books expressed an imminent war with China immediately following the 1996 Taiwan crisis. A decade later, most writings focused on the Chinese economic boom. Regardless, in 2008, talk of China as a threat within military circles buzzes like the latest new thing, despite immediate concerns in the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. It sounds as if the threat is now an eminent clash sometime within the next decade. My knowledge of any China issues, however, was no greater than in 2001.

I chose this thesis as a personal journey to understand what most Americans do not even ponder. I wanted to know if war with China was so imminent, when, and how. I began by writing my campaign paper on the Manchurian Incident and the Japanese conquest of Manchuria, in order to understand Chinese history. Although China boasts a 5000 year history of civilization, the century of humiliation beginning in the Qing Dynasty through World War II

provided the most significant piece of understanding China's immediate goals. I chose the Chinese elective at Command & Staff College to support my thesis and discovered that the East Asian way of thinking and earlier Chinese history is the most significant piece to of understanding China's long-term goals. The journey culminated with language study and an immersion trip to Beijing and the Guangdong province.

I extend many thanks to those who contributed to my learning: Dr. Bruce Bechtol, my MMS writing mentor and Marine Corps Command & Staff College Conference Group 2 Faculty Advisor and associate professor; Director, School of Advance Warfare, LtCol Woodbridge; Marine Corps War College professor, Dr. Edward O'Dowd; DLI instructors, Lu Laoshi and Yu Laoshi; BGen. John Allen, former Commanding Officer, The Basic School; LtCol Michael Ronza, Head of CSC Delegation to China and CSC Conference Group 11 Faculty Advisor; members of the U.S. Embassy Beijing staff; U.S. Marine Defense Attaché China LtCol Chad SBragia; U.S. Army Defense Attaché China, LtCol Fu; United States Defense Attaché, China, BGen Hooper; the many foreign attaches I encounter during my trip to China.

## Executive Summary

**Title:** Why China Matters: Is There an Imminent Threat?

**Author:** Major Wesley E. Terry, United States Marine Corps

**Thesis:** China is an increasing threat to U.S. power and influence, and as its military modernizes, China is more confident to use coercive diplomacy, over real military engagements while the U.S. is involved in multiple protracted wars.

**Discussion/Conclusion:** The United States and the People's Republic of China (China) share a complex and mixed relationship. Both countries declare peaceful intentions while being suspicious of the other, despite a opening relations and a Cold War alliance just more than twenty-five years ago. China believes the post-Cold War world is multi-polar and loudly resists power politics and "hegemonic" threats, such as the U.S. and its way of diplomacy. The U.S., on the other hand, is alarmed at the rapid economic and expansion and military modernization that seems outsized for the minimal security threats China faces. The two countries appear to be on a diplomatic collision course that could easily lead to unwanted military engagements on both sides, over a few major issues.

China's military potential cannot currently project itself globally, but is capable of creating regional instability. While China has major internal issues to concern itself with, such as Tibet and the Muslims in its western frontier, U.S. relationships with Japan and Taiwan pose considerable external threats. On the one hand, China views U.S. presence in the region as a deterrent to Japan repeating its imperial past. On the other hand, the relationship enables Japan to expand militarily when it should not be doing so. Japan is China's natural enemy that will not be forgiven for past atrocities.

Taiwan poses the most immediate threat to China and the most probable flashpoint for a military engagement. The threat is both external and internal, justifying any aggressive actions China might take. On the one hand, it is a rebellious province that needs to be absorbed back into the motherland. On the other hand, it is Chinese territory being subverted by the U.S. hegemony. Several unfortunate incidents in the past decade helped strain Sino-American relations, but none more so than the 1996 Taiwan crisis. The crisis showed China's more aggressive style of coercive diplomacy and definite willingness to take Taiwan by force. It also showed the U.S. willingness to uphold its 1954 agreement to protect Taiwan and the ability to do so rapidly.

China is content to exercise patience and continue its modernization until it can either take Taiwan by force rapidly before the U.S. can respond, or by subversion with an immediate change to combat operations, to ensure a fait accompli. Neither option will occur in the immediate future. China is enjoying its economic success, but its actions, and words from its officers confirm that it has long-term goals to capture islands in the region and project itself globally in the future. The next ten years will see increased suspicion. Between ten and twenty years from now, the U.S. must be prepared to confront the Taiwan issue again.

## INTRODUCTION

In 2005, the CBS News Editorial Board asked Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, to clarify the United States' relationship with China. She answered, stating the relationship was complex and "kind of mixed."<sup>1</sup> Not surprising, foreign relations between major and emerging powers balance friendship and national interests. For example, the Sino-American trade relationship is quite beneficial to American consumers, but economically lopsided in China's favor. Also, the growing Chinese economy has not undertaken all of the reforms necessary to integrate into a rules-based system like the World Trade Organization – specifically, protection of intellectual property rights and aggressive policies designed to deter and prosecute piracy. Sino-American relations found common ground in the six-party talks on a nuclear North Korea. Neither nation wants a nuclear Korean peninsula. However, the relationship sours immediately with regard to the Taiwan issue. The global war on terrorism also created common ground, but divisions still exist regarding the invasion of Iraq by the U.S. and subordination of Tibet and Muslim provinces in the west by China.

Then there is the Chinese military buildup, which "looks outsized for China's regional concerns."<sup>2</sup> The People's Liberation Army (PLA) has downsized in recent years, but many soldiers simply transferred to a less familiar People's Armed Police (PAP). The reduction and transferring units/personnel to PAP indicate two things. First, China's modernization of the military includes equipping and professionalizing the PLA in a manner that requires less ground forces. Second, China's most critical security threats exist internally. Why would China need such a formidable military for internal threats? The real PLA threat to the U.S. remains the large number of divisions and modern equipment placed directly across from Taiwan. Condoleezza Rice continued her interview by stating that China's military buildup "has to be an issue for the



United States since the defense of the Pacific, along with our allies in South Korea and Japan, has an American concern.”

The United States and China will never engage militarily over such things as trade deficits or pirated software. An analysis of China’s military potential, threat perceptions, and strategic culture, shows China is an increasing threat to U.S. power and influence, and as its military modernizes, China is more confident to use coercive diplomacy, over real military engagements while the U.S. is involved in multiple protracted wars. China wants to methodically engulf Asia and the Pacific under the realm of Chinese influence while the U.S. is overstretched and weakening. The main sources of tension are U.S. allies in the region; and if a military engagement does break out between the two countries, its most likely flashpoint is Taiwan. The 1996 Taiwan crisis and its impact provide a map to the next Taiwan incident.

#### CHINA’S MILITARY POTENTIAL

According to the authors of the much-publicized book *The Coming Conflict with China*, China “is bound to be no longer a strategic friend of the United States, but a long-term adversary.”<sup>3</sup> In *The Great Wall and the Empty Fortress: China’s Search for Security*, political science professors, Robert Ross and Andrew Nathan (Boston College University and Columbia University, respectively) suggest that concerns over China’s human rights record, rapid economic development, and influence in American politics created the impression that China is America’s foremost post-Cold War adversary.<sup>4</sup> They argue that Chinese foreign policy is actually realist-based principles and U.S. misperceptions of Chinese behavior stem from ignorance about China’s security concerns.

China’s economic rise and military modernization over the past decade raises several questions. First, is China an immediate military threat to the United States? Second, what would

be the most likely cause of a U.S./China conflict? Finally, is China militarily capable of beating the United States? Emergent conditions existed to predict China's ascent to world economic power status, but its consistently rising defense budget indicates a shift in strategic priorities, from which two debates exist. First, is China building its military muscle to take Taiwan by force, and second, whether China poses an imminent threat to do so, or is instead exercising a long-term plan.

For the time being, many would argue that China possesses only modest military capabilities compared to other world powers, and especially the United States. There is no real fear of Chinese military aggression. China is a paper tiger and not as militarily capable as the U.S. fears. Ross and Nathan argue that China is more of a regional than world power, beset by both internal and external security problems.<sup>5</sup> Although China has embarked on a massive modernization program, in terms of military capabilities, it possesses only a modest challenge to the region and the world. Notwithstanding the notion, China unquestionably possesses modern military equipment and the second largest military in terms of number of personnel, making it a formidable and costly foe on any battlefield. On the other hand, China's short-term modesty may be even shorter due to its rapid modernization in technology and doctrine.

#### PLA Navy

Extremely important in China's military modernization is an ambitious naval buildup. The three reasons strengthening the PLA Navy is so important are 1) to recapture its proud naval stature from the fourteenth and fifteenth century; 2) to safeguard the shipping lanes that are the lifeline of China's burgeoning economy; and 3) to supplant the U.S. Pacific hegemony. China's current attitude reflects a type of coming out from the humiliating decades of Japanese and Western subordination and colonialism.

China has started a propaganda campaign to support its naval buildup, trumpeting the Ming Dynasty admiral Zheng He, who commanded voyages of trade and discovery in Southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean from 1405-1433. Zheng sailed the Treasure Fleet, which was considered a technological marvel. Ships were outfitted with compasses and armed with incendiary weapons. Ship hulls were subdivided to limit flooding. Zheng's fleet carried trade and brought back China's tributes. China's propaganda also points out that as powerful as the fleet was, Zheng's expeditions were primarily commercial and diplomatic in nature. Therefore, as China makes its case whether or not it can be trusted with a growing, powerful navy, it argues, "even a militarily dominant China will be a more trustworthy custodian of Asian maritime security than any outside power."<sup>6</sup>

Beyond its propaganda, the practical uses of an improved Navy make it the most important modernization to monitor. Shipping lanes supplying the oil, gas, and raw material to China from the Middle East and Africa must be safeguarded. For the past six decades, the United States has supplied the security of free navigation in the Pacific and most importantly to China, the Malaccan Straits. Now the Navy modernization includes the desire to build an aircraft carrier, and a newly created Marine Corps, which are the keys to global power projection.

#### Strategic Goals

According to the 2006 *Quadrennial Defense Review* from the U.S. Department of Defense, China is the emerging power having "the greatest potential to compete militarily with the United States and field disruptive military technologies that could over time offset traditional U.S. military advantages absent U.S. counter strategies."<sup>7</sup> Since the fall of the Soviet Union, the U.S. emerged into the post-Cold War era as the sole superpower. China emerged from the Cold

War no longer facing any significant threat to its sovereignty or national interests; at least none that were visibly apparent to anyone. However, China has sustained a fast-paced military modernization that makes you ask, why? If China plans to maximize its military potential, the question is for what end and for what purpose?

China's military intentions are shrouded in a veil of secrecy. Since the Cold War, it has consistently presented a public display of friendship toward the United States, while internally misleading and provoking its people with nationalistic rhetoric. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice had observed in an interview that China's "military build up looks outsized for its regional concerns."<sup>8</sup> What would a "right sized" PLA look like in terms of China's national security strategy? Later, a threat perception analysis will show that China's build up is indicative of a country looking at its long-term global position, despite more immediate concerns at home. Its forces are currently inconsistent with Beijing's legitimate self-defense requirements in the immediate to near future, but maybe not in twenty years.

As competition for resources and world influence increases, the ability of the PLA to project power around the world becomes more important. For now, China does not need to beat the U.S. in a classic military bout using air, ground, and naval forces. China is extremely harmful if it decides to disrupt regional stability in an effort to expand its own influence and supplant U.S. influence in Asia. China's actions in the Taiwan straits in 1996 indicate it is more than willing to create regional instability. This incident is hereinafter the 1996 Taiwan crisis or just the Taiwan crisis. China conducted large-scale military exercises in threatening proximity to Taiwan, and caused the rerouting of international shipping and air. In the next ten to fifteen years, the most dangerous course of action is an actual People's Republic of China attack on Taiwan. In the next decade and a half China's military potential only needs to achieve

amphibious landing, air superiority, and naval blockade capabilities, in order to seize Taiwan in a very short period before the United States can effectively respond. The international community may frown at seizing Taiwan by force, but a strategic fait accompli is enough to succeed.

### SINO-AMERICAN RELATIONS

During the Cold War, the Soviet Union was so powerful in Asia that China's sovereignty was threatened. Since the end of the Cold war, and the United State's ascent as the sole global superpower, China has explicitly declared the U.S. as its new hegemonic threat. It seems to have taken just a little over a decade for Sino-American relations to begin turning towards separate paths. In 1979, the United States' relationship with the Communist nation was reestablished as a balance to the Soviet Union, but by the early nineties China's anti-American rhetoric began. On May 13, 1994, the BBC reported Asian broadcasts from China's Chief of the General Staff Zhang Wannian's address at a communist meeting in Beijing. The address, entitled "Reinforcing the Army, Accelerating the Army's Modernization, Firmly opposing Interference and Subversion from Hegemonism, and Defending the Motherland, left no doubt who the "hegemonist" was:

Facing blatant interference by the American hegemonists in our internal affairs and their open support for the debilitating activities of hostile elements inside our country and hostile forces outside the mainland and overseas opposing and subverting our socialist system, we must reinforce the Armed Forces more intensively.

At the same meeting, before he became leader of the Chinese Communist Party, Hu Jintao echoed Zhang:

According to the global hegemonist of the United States, its main rival at present is the PRC. Interfering in China, subverting the Chinese government and strangling China's development are strategic principals pursued by the United States.

Today, Hu Jintao is the Paramount Leader of the People's Republic of China, and heads all three branches of the Chinese political system – General Secretary of the Communist Party of China, President of the People's Republic of China, and Chairman of the Military Commission. In addition to the loud rhetoric and huff puffery, several unintended incidents tested the resolve of both nations. The following events are some examples.

On April 1, 2001, a U.S. Navy EP-3 surveillance plane was involved in a mid-air collision with a Chinese fighter aircraft over the South China Sea, and made an emergency landing on China's Hainan Island airfield. China claimed the right to investigate the incident while it detained the twenty-four U.S. Navy personnel. The Chinese pilot crashed into the sea, and a second Chinese pilot gave an official statement several days later, detailing the events of the two Chinese fighter jets intercepting the U.S. plane. Naturally, the Chinese pilot stated the U.S. plane caused the accident, while U.S. responses all placed blame on China. The detained personnel were eventually released, but China's resolve to enforce her claims of sovereign territory was the real significance.

President George W. Bush faced a tough decision whether or not to approve Taiwan's request for advanced weapons and defense systems within a month of the EP-3 incident. Beijing previously warned that the sale of such weapons could alter the strategic balance between Taiwan and mainland China, and could trigger a cross-Straits war. Such proximity to the EP-3 incident made his decision occur at the most inopportune time.

On May 7, 1999, NATO air strikes bombed the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade, Yugoslavia, during the U.S. led NATO campaign in Kosovo. NATO claimed outdated maps provided by the CIA caused the incident, which killed three Chinese citizens. An outraged China believed the bombing was intentional and deliberate. The two sides reached agreement on

humanitarian payments for the families of those killed and injured, and for damaged property. By year's end, relations had slightly improved.<sup>9</sup>

On November 21, 2007, the USS Kitty Hawk aircraft carrier and several support vessels were scheduled to dock in Hong Kong for a Thanksgiving Day visit. Hundreds of sailors' families had flown into the city to spend the holiday with their loved ones, while dozens of Americans living in Hong Kong prepared turkey dinners for those without family. Unexpectedly, China turned the Kitty Hawk away. Hours later, China permitted the visit after U.S. ships had already returned to their homeports. After unfavorable international press, Chinese Foreign Ministry representative Liu Jianchao said Beijing had "decided to allow the Kitty Hawk strike group to stay in Hong Kong during Thanksgiving, out of humanitarian considerations only."<sup>10</sup> The U.S. Navy retaliated by sailing the Kitty Hawk through the Taiwan Strait on its way back to Japan. Traditionally, U.S. aircraft carriers had always avoided sailing in the Taiwan Strait, even during heightened tensions in the 1996 Taiwan incident.<sup>11</sup>

The Kitty Hawk refusal was not the first. China banned U.S. ships entering Hong Kong waters in 1999 after the Chinese embassy bombing and refused port calls for several months after the spy plane collision. A pattern exists that when Sino-American relations are strained, Hong Kong is off limits. At the time of the Thanksgiving incident, the strains in Sino-American relations included the lopsided trade deficit and the inability to resolve Iran's failure to halt uranium enrichment.

The most diplomatically challenging incident, from which fears of a Taiwan flashpoint are built, was the 1996 Taiwan Strait crisis. That year, during a presidential election campaign on Taiwan, China conducted military exercises in the Taiwan Strait in order to intimidate voters. The U.S. responded by dispatching two aircraft carrier battle groups (now "strike groups") to the

region. It all began as tensions increased over President Bush's approval of the six billion dollar sale of F-16s to Taiwan in response to China receiving advanced fighter aircraft (SU-27) from Russia. Taiwan's president had also begun a campaign to gain re-admittance to the United Nations.

Earlier that year, U.S. intelligence detected PLA mobilization on the mainland, opposite Taiwan. By March, China revealed its intent to conduct missile tests and large-scale naval exercises in the Taiwan Strait. Just two weeks before the first fully free democratic election in Taiwan's history, China fired three intermediate range missiles close to Taiwan's two largest ports, disrupting shipping. At the same time, Chinese huff puffery made it clear that China had not ruled out the use of force to settle the Taiwan question. The aircraft carrier, USS Independence was two hundred miles away and President Clinton ordered the carrier, USS Nimitz, to join it. Both powers flexed, and the incident lasted through the elections, until China ended the exercises; but rhetoric was fierce. A Chinese official told a visiting former American State Department official, Chas W. Freeman that China was prepared to use nuclear missiles targeted on the American West Coast if the U.S. intervened militarily on Taiwan.<sup>12</sup>

Some sources say that U.S. and Taiwanese intelligence picked up signals that China was planning a naval landing on a small island in the Taiwan Strait, close to Taiwanese controlled Fujian Province. Whether or not China intentionally planted the signals, the knowledge of a plan helps assess China's operational capabilities and probable courses of action if it did intend to take Taiwan by force. Freeman also reported that the Chinese informed him the PLA had already planned for a missile attack consisting of one strike a day for thirty days.<sup>13</sup> The most useful takeaways for the U.S. are that China has considered multiple military actions and is ready



to intimidate Taiwan when displeased. The U.S. should also recognize that China tested the U.S. resolve to support Taiwan, and more importantly, its ability to respond.

Something important about Sino-American relations is the understanding of multi-polarity versus uni-polarity. The U.S. believes the global environment is uni-polar, simply because the Cold War was characterized as a bipolar world. China believes the world is becoming multi-polar and multiple nations are responsible for influencing international decisions. This notion fits the Chinese, or East Asian, way of thinking. In China, the individual's duty is a responsibility to the community, not himself or even his family. Likewise, in the ruling communist party, Hu Jintao, the ultimate leader of the country, exists in a system where the politburo rules, and Hu's head is just slightly above the others. Even speeches are submitted to party members first, so everyone has an eye and edit on it before presenting to the public. In a uni-polar world, China expects regional countries to engage with China before making decisions affected solely by U.S. influence.

### THREAT PERCEPTIONS

In order to understand Sino-American relations you must understand Chinese threat perceptions. David Shambaugh, a leading international authority on Chinese strategic and military affairs, published *Modernizing China's Military* in 2004, a comprehensive assessment of the Chinese military. The book is the result of analyses of Chinese military publications and interviews with People's Liberation Army (PLA) officers. Shambaugh makes the following points about Chinese threat perceptions.

Since the beginning of this century, China cannot claim any significant military threats to its sovereignty. Even Russia, a Cold War adversary, has entered several bilateral agreements with China, and the two have formed some type of strategic cooperation. For example, their

heads of state now see each other in annual summits, they have a formal nuclear non-targeting agreement, and since 1990, 40% of Russia's annual arms trade goes to China, which also makes up almost all of China's foreign arms purchases. Russia also provides some military training and the two countries participate in annual military-to-military exercises. Both countries want to prevent hegemonies and power politics (common references to the United States) in Asia.

Along with strengthening Russian ties, China moved quickly to establish diplomatic relations with former Soviet countries in the region, and eventually formed the Shanghai five – China, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Russia – which is now formally known as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization with the addition of Uzbekistan. Despite India undermining an attempt to improve Sino-Indian relations in 1998 by detonating a nuclear bomb, China and India have pressed with bilateral talks to resolve their issues. Like the U.S., India is a hegemonic threat to China, but unlike the U.S., India lacks the ability to project power and intervene all over the world. The real security threat exists from India's influence on sea lines of communication from the Middle East, and the security of critical Chinese oil shipments.

With no imminent hostile threats, China subscribes to the notion that the world will become multi-polar and characterizes the international arena as economically competitive countries with common goals for cooperation and peace. In 1994, former Vice President of the Central Military Commission, General Liu Huaqing, wrote, "The world structure is speeding up its development toward a multi-polar world. Peace and economic development are the two major goals for which people throughout the world strive."<sup>14</sup> In the 2002 Defense White Paper China clearly admitted, "A new world war is unlikely in the foreseeable future." China's perception of the global security situation is multi-polarization and economic globalization, along with rapid advances in science and technology. Because of the global economy, which

deepens economic interdependence, peace is paramount. The major powers and developing countries are competing fiercely, but have also increased their coordination and cooperation since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001.<sup>15</sup>

China's national defense policy reflects the aforementioned views regarding strategic security. The 2002 White Paper stresses that China has always pursued a defensive natured policy with a fundamental basis of safeguarding state sovereignty, unity, and territorial integrity and security. Defenses to anything regarding China's borders or encroachment upon its autonomous decision-making ability are expected. The White Paper states, almost explicitly, that China is preparing itself to protect almost any hindrance to its rapid economic development. China's economy and military are growing inseparably together. The modernization of the military and information technology go hand in hand as necessary entities in the global arena.

It is important to understand the world as China does in order to analyze China's perceived security threats and predict future behavior. Interestingly, the Pentagon's *Annual Report to congress: The Military of the People's Republic of China 2005* confesses that the "outside world has little knowledge of Chinese motivations and decision making." Susan Craig, however, interviewed and analyzed the writings of who she calls China's influential elite, in order to complete her monograph, "Chinese Perceptions of Traditional and Nontraditional Security Threats."<sup>16</sup> The influential elite consist of Chinese scholars and Chinese news media. The scholars are from research institutes – similar to American think tanks – as well as government and military leaders. Even though the scholars and media are all government controlled, because it is the only information given to the people, it forms Chinese perceptions.

Use caution when challenging these perceptions if the challenge arises from viewing through American or western lenses. For example, China's influential elite may have a far

different perception than former U.S. Secretary of defense Donald Rumsfeld's pronouncement during a 2005 speech in Singapore that China did not face any threats from other nations.<sup>17</sup> According to Craig, the influential elite believe that China's national security is threatened both traditionally and nontraditionally. Traditional threats are the most common. They are threats to a nation emanating from other nations, and involving a military component. In China's case, traditional threats are external threats from neighboring nations, as well as regional actors, and countries capable of global power projection. Nontraditional threats consist of those that create the internal problems China faces, such as social disparities contributing to the internal issues in Tibet and China's western frontier.

China has a five thousand year history. During its history, China considered itself the center of the world. China does not want to repeat, however, the century of humiliation, a period from the early to mid 1800s to post World War II. During this time, the Qing Dynasty allowed western nations, or "evil imperial invaders," to encroach on China. Multiple countries dissected and occupied China, and forced China to agree to unfavorable trade and land agreements. In 1949, the height of the communist revolution, Mao Tse Tung overlooked Tiananmen Square in Beijing and declared, "The Chinese have stood up."

In an effort not to repeat history, China is threatened by U.S. hegemony. In the aftermath of the Belgrade bombing in 1999, China's Vice Chairman of the Central Military Commission told senior PLA leaders, "U.S. hegemonism is public enemy number one of the PLA." China believes that the U.S. is adamantly trying to hold on to Cold War concepts and assert itself as the unilateral leader of the world at a time when the world is becoming multi-polar. China believes it holds a relative place of influence in the multi-polar world.

The influential elite regularly use the phrase, the "China threat theory." The phrase is used to describe the suspicion on both sides. America is suspicious of a rising China, and China is suspicious of America's efforts to contain China. China fears the spread of the "China threat theory" for several reasons. First, the U.S. can use the phrase to influence the global perception of China. Second, if believed, it more explicitly makes China America's strategic enemy, immediately changing the fragile relationship and causing the U.S. to revert to old Cold War attitudes. China believes comments like the one made by former Secretary Rumsfeld fuels the theory, along with overt propaganda in the form of the Pentagon's Annual Report to Congress.

China's Politburo believes the United States has an anti-China strategy that is aimed at strangling China's socialism and reducing it to a vassal state, interfering in China's internal affairs under the pretext of human rights, and making judgments in terms of ideology. China's 2000 Defense White Paper accuses the United States of pursuing neo-interventionism, neo-gunboat diplomacy, and neo-colonialism.<sup>18</sup> China's perception that the United States is the greatest threat to world peace is repeated in every Defense White Paper through 2006 since the first was published in 1998:

Hegemonism and power politics remain the main sources of threat to world peace and stability; the Cold War mentality and its influence still have a certain currency, and enlargement of military blocs and strengthening military alliances have added factors of instability to international security. Some countries, by relying on their military advantages, pose military threats to other countries, even resorting to armed intervention.

China believes the U.S. is using a containment policy to maintain itself as the Pacific hegemony. Therefore a short analysis of the geopolitical threat is necessary.

The most influential American geopolitician was geostrategist Nicholas Spykman. Spykman argued that the critical geopolitical area of the globe was an area he termed the

Rimland.<sup>19</sup> The Rimland is critical because it consists of the coastal nations forming a rim around Eurasia, essentially having influence on both the sea and the interior. Spykman would say, "Who controls the Rimland rules Eurasia; who rules Eurasia controls the destinies of the world." The significance is that Spykman's Rimland Theory greatly influenced the U.S. Cold War policy of containment.<sup>20</sup> If a hostile power consolidates by occupation or alliance with the Rimland nations, they essentially control everything within and the areas of the sea without – hegemony. U.S. control of the Rimland contains the power and maintains U.S. dominance of the sea.

Spykman's theory is applicable beyond the Cold War and the Soviet Union. There are people who would argue today that the study of geopolitics is no longer necessary. They would argue that rimlands and containment are outdated, because globalization transcends all geographical boundaries. But the view of China as an emerging threat to U.S. security and economic interests, and the fear of a growing China hegemony, pushes geopolitics and the Rimland Theory back to fore. The Asian nations in the Rimland are Korea, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, and Thailand. Japan and Taiwan, though not continentally attached, are the most significant; and to a lesser extent, regional players like the Phillipines and Indonesia.

China, as an emergent economic power, realizes that a trading nation must secure its markets rather than rely solely on a competitive economic edge. Twentieth century fears consisted largely of great powers confronting each other. Lines were clearly drawn and enemies did not hide their views. The twenty-first century, however, is defined by an international arena struggling to stabilize in the post-cold war era. Even while the U.S. internally debates its strategy in Asia, China's growth gives it the confidence to challenge U.S. presence in the region. U.S. presence in Asia is seen by the number of military personnel stationed in Japan and

Okinawa, and the Republic of Korea. A U.S. naval presence is also met securing the movement of global trade, which really means ensuring goods bound for America and from America reach their destinations – but not just limited to U.S. traffic.

There are smaller nations in the region, some economically powerful, who have their own strategic concerns and fears. Vietnam was invaded by China in 1979, as well as Singapore, and Taiwan. Taiwan, obviously, has the most delicate relationship, due to a separatist movement, constant Chinese rhetoric regarding reunification, and aggressive actions by China in an intimidation campaign. Mostly everyone welcomes the U.S. presence in the region to help preserve security and stability; obviously, to some more than others and to some very limited in scope. Understanding Russian foreign policy and Indian ambition are extensive studies in themselves, although geopolitically inseparable; but for certain, China, with or without others, are adamant not to allow U.S. presence to exist as strongly as it does in Asia in the years to come.

The U.S., in its own self-interest, realizes that its presence in Asia serves as a deterrent to instability from Northeast Asia to Indonesia and the South China Sea. China resents the strength of the U.S. It also resents that absences of the U.S. presence in Asia would destabilize the region. Therefore, Chinas' modernization aims at the ability to influence and stabilize the region without the U.S. presence.

Robert Scales' Strategic Studies Institute monogram, "The Future U.S Military Presence in Asia," argues that a U.S. withdrawal from Northeast Asia would leave a major void in the strategic architecture, leading to a serious arms race, competition for control of the Korean peninsula, competition for control of the sea and air lanes, and probably a nuclear arms race.<sup>21</sup> Both China and the United States would make the same argument regarding hegemony; neither

claims the desire to occupy foreign territory. However, China's fears are based on the number of U.S. forces in South Korea, Okinawa, and mainland Japan.

Of all the nations in the region, Japan is China's biggest enemy. The history of Japanese violence and oppression in China is something China just does not forget. Although some of the smaller nations seem to be apathetic to Japan's history and enjoy current relations, China does not refrain from reminding both Koreas of the dark history under Japanese rule. Despite Japan's military establishment being completely dismantled after World War II, and the subsequent post-war constitution creating a pacifist nation against war, China does not trust Japan. China views the growth in size and capabilities of Japan's Strategic Defense Force as beyond the scope of a purely self-defense, especially since Japan has formal defense agreements with the U.S.

At one point, it looked as though the Japanese-U.S. alliance was coming apart. In 1995, seventy-seven percent of Japanese polled said they favored a "major reduction" in American forces. That same year, the United States Ambassador to Tokyo and former Vice President of the United States, Walter Mondale said the whole security relationship was in question. The 1996 Taiwan crisis revived fears in the Japanese government. In 1996, Japanese Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto met President Bill Clinton in California. The meeting resulted in President Clinton's agreement to reduce the number of U.S. forces in Japan, and the transfer of some bases back to Japan. What initially looked like a move weakening U.S. strength in Asia was actually a strategic gain for both countries. In a classic quid pro quo deal, just three days after the two national leaders met, Prime Minister Hashimoto publicly declared that Beijing "might be heading in the wrong direction in Asia." Japan had chosen sides. The statement symbolized Japan's stance to strengthen its alliance with the United States because of the growing threat from China.<sup>22</sup>



A strengthened U.S.-Japanese alliance presents a huge threat to China. After Prime Minister Hashimoto's visit, President Clinton visited Japan and formally announced a Japan-U.S. Joint Declaration on the Security Alliance for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. This declaration explicitly stated Japan's affirmation that American military presence in Asia was "essential for preserving peace and stability." Japan also agreed that U.S. forces could respond to events on Taiwan and the Korean peninsula from bases in Japan.

To China, U.S. presence in Japan is supposed to ensure that Japan does not remilitarize and revert to its historical aggressive behavior. So, on the one hand, China benefits from the presence of U.S. forces. On the other hand, U.S. forces remaining in the region underscore U.S. influence in the region and other nations' reliance on the U.S. instead of China. Robert Scales and Larry Wortzel state that while China publicly states its principled objection to the stationing of forces on foreign soil, privately Chinese leaders acknowledge that the American presence in Japan acts as a guard against remilitarization, as well as stabilization of the Korean peninsula.<sup>23</sup> In the worst case, China knows that continuous presence of U.S. troops in Korea or Japan allows the U.S. the flexibility to conduct major combat operations in Asia on a short notice, including necessary support to Taiwan. Robert Scales and Larry Wortzel state that while China publicly states its principled objection to the stationing of forces on foreign soil, privately Chinese leaders acknowledge that the American presence in Japan acts as a guard against remilitarization, as well as stabilization of the Korean peninsula.<sup>24</sup> Notwithstanding the six-party talks on the nuclear peninsula issue, Sino-American relations are effected less by current actions in Korea.

China does not want a reunified Korean peninsula for reasons that are ideological and geopolitical. Ideologically, reunification places a prosperous democratic state on her border. China's anti-western views were largely formed by the manner in which western powers, or even

hegemonic powers like Russia and Japan, methodically spread into China from the frontiers, and the coastal regions farthest from the emperor. The Cold War separation of the two Koreas created an ideological buffer that China enjoys. Even though China has prospered since Deng's economic reforms, the elite ruling party does not want a prosperous democratic society sharing its border. It would allow too easily for democratic ideas to infiltrate the country.

U.S. forces currently stationed in South Korea are not guaranteed to leave once the peninsula is unified. The notion that China would ever tolerate the presence of U.S. forces on the peninsula without the buffer is extremely difficult to argue. If the U.S. is a hegemonic threat and China fears encroachment, then the presence of the encroaching army at the gates of the empire has to be unacceptable.

Regardless of whether or not China wants it, reunification of the Korean peninsula is inevitable and may come as unexpectedly as the fall of the Soviet Empire. It is hard to accurately measure closed societies, and the CIA World Fact Book estimates North Korea's forty billion dollar GDP is stagnant, if not shrinking.<sup>25</sup> That means South Korea's trillion-dollar economy will bear the financial burden of reunification much like the unification of Germany after the Cold War. Reunification places China and the U.S. on a diplomatic collision course. At what point during the 21<sup>st</sup> century the two Koreas unite will determine how serious China is at pushing back against American hegemony. Certainly, China twenty years from now may have the world's largest economy and second most modernized military.

#### CHINA & STRATEGIC CULTURE & JUST WAR THEORY

Dr. Andrew Scobell's Strategic Studies Institute monograph, *China and Strategic Culture*, relates the manner in which culture influences the way strategists in different countries think about matters of war and peace. His monograph is important to this work because it adds a

fuller appreciation for how Chinese strategists view the United States and its key Asian allies. The Defense Intelligence Agency sponsored Dr. Scobell's research abroad in China. In Chinese eyes, the core features of U.S. strategic culture are expansionism and hegemonism. To China, the United States is an offensive country.

The Western way of war defines the strategic culture China was subjected to in the century of humiliation. The Western way of war over 400 years saw western countries expand across the globe – a political-economic phenomenon whereby various European nations explored, conquered, settled, and exploited large areas of the world. Expansion contained realist thought. Colonialism was about more than power. For Great Britain, expansionist policies were necessary because of limited resources. For others, expansion supported strategic security concerns. Regardless, expansion is contrary to the view China has of itself.

Chinese strategic culture is the opposite. China boasts a 5000-year history of peaceful civilization. China would argue today that in her entire history, she has never acted aggressively against another nation except defensively. On the other hand, the western way of war is purely offensive. China excludes, though, its violent history of internal struggles for unification, and preemptive measures for strategic defense. Such a preemptive measure was taken in 1979 when China invaded Vietnam. China's decision was triggered by the strengthening Vietnam-Soviet Union ties, the numerous Vietnamese incursions across the border into China and a related policy of forcing hundreds of thousands of ethnic Chinese residents to flee Vietnam, and because of Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia. Preemptive is defensive to China, but do not undervalue its aggressive and offensive nature, such as when China showed no hesitation to preemptively cross the Yalu River in 1950 against U.S. forces in Korea. In China, the justness of a war is determined by its influence on the development of society. They facilitate the progress of

society. Susan Craig listed the following examples of just wars under China's 'just war' theory: (1) peoples war; (2) revolutionary war; and (3) anti-aggressive war.<sup>26</sup> Based on China's view of American strategic culture, its own strategic culture, and just war theory, China would view taking Taiwan by force a just anti-aggressive war. Although it first appears that China would be the aggressor, the rationale is that Taiwan continues to be a rebellious region because of U.S. subversion tactics that supply Taiwan with superior modern arms, financial markets, and government persuasion. The U.S. is the outside aggressor and taking Taiwan by force is the means to stop the U.S.

A perception exists that China has a predisposition to seek nonviolent solutions to problems of statecraft. People often cite the revered teachers Sun Tzu and Confucius, individuals whose teachings promote avoiding decisive battle and harmony within a group, rather than leveraging military strength and seeking individual gains. The Great Wall is a symbol of Chinese defensive traditions. Chinese soldiers took decades to build it, at the cost of many lives, in order to protect the empire from Mongol invaders. The 1996 Taiwan Crisis, however, is an example of coercive diplomacy that is a growing strategy since the late 1970s.

China enjoys engaging in coercive diplomacy. Coercive diplomacy is simply the use of threats instead of negotiation. For example, both China and the U.S. threaten adverse consequences if either fails to meet a demand or breaches a set condition. Coercive diplomacy is a hard line approach that does little to improve relationships, and is therefore, risky. For China, it is even riskier because it will not work against Taiwan as long as Taiwan believes it enjoys continuous U.S. commitment to Taiwan's defense. Without the U.S. honoring its 1954 agreement to defend Taiwan, a thousand Chinese missiles within range directly across the

Taiwan Strait and large-scale military exercises like those in 1996 are enough to succeed at coercive diplomacy.

### TAIWAN

The One-China policy is a principle that there is one China and that mainland China, Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan are all part of that China. The PRC adamantly holds this policy and requires all countries seeking diplomatic relations with it to acknowledge it and refrain from maintaining relations with the Republic of China, which governs Taiwan. The Republic of China's position towards the policy is the opposite. The Republic of China once claimed sovereignty over mainland China, but these claims are no longer actively pursued.

China's position is clear. The U.S. has interfered in China's internal affairs, by continuing to sell weapons and military equipment to Taiwan and elevating relations with the Taiwan authorities, thereby inflating the separatists' arrogance and undermining China's peaceful reunification.<sup>27</sup> According to China, the separatist force is the biggest threat to peace and stability in the Taiwan Straits. Otherwise, it speaks of increasingly good relations between the mainland and the island. The root cause of tension is the Taiwanese leadership's refusal to accept the One-China principle, opting instead for independence.

The U.S. has placed itself in an awkward diplomatic position. Only twenty-three countries formally recognize Taiwan's independence – all of them small poor countries located in Africa and the Caribbean.<sup>28</sup> The U.S. does not formally recognize Taiwan, despite Taiwan's democratic government and its global status as a major economic player. However, the U.S. maintains informal diplomatic ties, and Taiwan is the U.S.' eighth largest trading partner.<sup>29</sup> In appearance, the United States is not willing to confront China by formally recognizing Taiwan, nor willing to lose regional credibility by denouncing Taiwanese claims for independence. The

U.S. remains committed to honoring the agreement to defend Taiwan against an aggressive China.

China is never going to release its claim over Taiwan. China views Taiwan as a rebellious province that can be retaken at will. The U.S. is content to deter China from taking Taiwan by force, while the issue is peacefully resolved. The 1996 Taiwan crisis proved that the U.S. was willing to respond militarily. China, on the other hand, is proving patience, and is methodically preparing itself to accomplish the same goal militarily in the distant future when its forces are ready. Recently, China has been attempting joint, combined arms exercises in the case it tries to conduct amphibious assaults to seize Taiwan, but China may also be willing to accept the status quo until its forces are ready, so long as Taiwan does not increase its attempts to join NATO and enforce its independence.

Taiwan is the Flashpoint that will lead to any type of Sino-American military confrontation. Once again the issue of reunification places China and the U.S. on a diplomatic collision course. China's economic and military growth guarantees an eventual showdown. Based on the previous U.S. ability to respond, China would either attempt to seize the island with such speed that it succeeds in a fait accompli, or it is able to avoid decisive and destructive combat by using subversive methods that allow the PLA to infiltrate or overtly occupy the island. In the Coming Conflict with China, Bernstein and Munro posed a semi-subversive scenario in a fictitious wargame. Patience during modernization saw China with a world-class modern military. China began conducting large-scale exercises similar to those in 1995-96 in another attempt at coercive diplomacy. This time, however, China's increased naval capabilities, including better attack submarines, allow it to successfully conduct a naval blockade to strangle Taiwan's trade and deter U.S. forces. Activated sleeper cells of pro-China citizens begin

demonstrations in front of government buildings. A pro-independence government crackdown leads to the need for China to step in and protect its law-abiding citizens from rebels.<sup>30</sup>

On the one hand, China could exercise its plan to shower the island and approaching U.S. ships with missiles, blanket the sky with fighter planes, gain air superiority, and conduct an amphibious landing. The result might be initially successful, but there would be thousands of casualties and China would have to hold the island during a showdown with the U.S. On the other hand, China will accomplish the fait accompli more efficiently if it places the U.S. in an indecisive position, much like the Japanese paralyzed international decision makers with ambiguous actions during following the Manchurian Incident.<sup>31</sup>

China could carry out a subversive tactic like the aforementioned scenario, but instead use one that would get less international criticism, such as some type of humanitarian relief operations on a large scale. China would begin by occupying the Pescadores. The Pescadores are an archipelago off the western coast of Taiwan in the Taiwan Strait consisting of 90 small islands covering an area of 141 square kilometers. They are administered by Taiwan. China's military has been preparing to capture small Pacific reefs.

Recently, a U.S. military delegation from the Marine Cops Command & Staff College conducted the first ever military to military visit in history at the PLA's Naval Surface Command Academy, which is located in the Guangdong military district across from Taiwan. During the visit, U.S. field grade officers conducted roundtable discussions with Chinese counterparts. PLA Marine Corps personnel described their role to capture reefs by amphibious landings. Also at the Academy were illuminated maps on the wall depicting sea lines of communication (LOC) going to numerous island reefs throughout the South China Sea. A visual note was made of one particular map that showed only one LOC – a direct line going straight to the Pescadores. A

PLA foothold in the Pescadores gives China the flexibility to exercise its so-called humanitarian assistance or government assistance operations with the ability to immediately change missions and capture the main island with less casualties, less destruction, and less unfavorable opinions, all before the U.S. arrives. By the time the U.S. does arrive, a fait accompli is complete.

### CONCLUSION

The United States and the People's Republic of China (China) share a complex and mixed relationship. Both countries declare peaceful intentions while being suspicious of the other, despite a opening relations and a Cold War alliance just more than twenty-five years ago. China believes the post-Cold War world is multi-polar and loudly resists power politics and "hegemonic" threats, such as the U.S. and its way of diplomacy. The U.S., on the other hand, is alarmed at the rapid economic expansion and military modernization that seems outsized for the minimal security threats China faces. The two countries appear to be on a diplomatic collision course that could easily lead to unwanted military engagements on both sides, over a few major issues.

China's military potential cannot currently project itself globally, but is capable of creating regional instability. While China has major internal issues to concern itself with, such as Tibet and the Muslims in its western frontier, U.S. relationships with Japan and Taiwan pose considerable external threats. On the one hand, China views U.S. presence in the region as a deterrent to Japan repeating its imperial past. On the other hand, the relationship enables Japan to expand militarily when it should not be doing so. Japan is China's natural enemy that will not be forgiven for past atrocities.

Taiwan poses the most immediate threat to China and the most probable flashpoint for a military engagement. The threat is both external and internal, justifying any aggressive actions



China might take. On the one hand, it is a rebellious province that needs to be absorbed back into the motherland. On the other hand, it is Chinese territory being subverted by the U.S. hegemony. Several unfortunate incidents in the past decade helped strain Sino-American relations, but none more so than the 1996 Taiwan crisis. The crisis showed China's more aggressive style of coercive diplomacy and definite willingness to take Taiwan by force. It also showed the U.S. willingness to uphold its 1954 agreement to protect Taiwan and the ability to do so rapidly.

China is content to exercise patience and continue its modernization until it can either take Taiwan by force rapidly before the U.S. can respond, or by subversion with an immediate change to combat operations, to ensure a *fait accompli*. Neither option will occur in the immediate future. China is enjoying its economic success, but its actions, and words from its officers confirm that it has long-term goals to capture islands in the region and project itself globally in the future. The next ten years will see increased suspicion. Between ten and twenty years from now, the U.S. must be prepared to confront the Taiwan issue again.

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<sup>1</sup> Rice, Condoleezza. "Interview with Condoleezza Rice." By CBS News Editorial Board. CBS News, September 12, 2005.

<http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2005/53033.htm> (accessed January 15, 2008).

<sup>2</sup> Rice, Condoleezza. "Interview with Condoleezza Rice." By CBS News Editorial Board. CBS News, September 12, 2005.

<http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2005/53033.htm> (accessed January 15, 2008).

<sup>3</sup> Richard Bernstein and Ross H. Munro, *The Coming Conflict with China* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998), 22.

<sup>4</sup> Nathan, Andrew J. Nathan and Robert S. Ross, *The Great Wall and the Empty Fortress: China's Search for Security*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1998), 32.

<sup>5</sup> Nathan, Andrew J. Nathan and Robert S. Ross, *The Great Wall and the Empty Fortress: China's Search for Security*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1998), 33-34.

<sup>6</sup> James Holmes and Toshi Yoshihara, "Soft Power Goes to Sea," *The American Interest*, v. III no. 4, March/April 2008.

<sup>7</sup> U.S. Department of Defense, Quadrennial Defense Review Report, February 6, 2006, p. 29, available at [www.defenselink.mil/pubs/pdfs/QDR20060203.pdf](http://www.defenselink.mil/pubs/pdfs/QDR20060203.pdf). (accessed December 22, 2008).

<sup>8</sup> Rice, Condoleezza. "Interview with Condoleezza Rice." By CBS News Editorial Board. CBS News, September 12, 2005.

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<http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2005/53033.htm> (accessed January 15, 2008).

<sup>9</sup> Operation Allied Force

<sup>10</sup> The Associated Press, "China says Kitty Hawk can enter Hong Kong, hours after sailors already left," *International Herald Tribune*, November 1, 2007.

<sup>11</sup> Kishore Mahbubani, "Smart Power, Chinese-Style," *The American Interest*, v. III no. 4, March/April 2008.

<sup>12</sup> Richard Bernstein and Ross H. Munro, *The Coming Conflict with China* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998), 153-154.

<sup>13</sup> *Id.* at 155.

<sup>14</sup> Michael Pillsbury, ed. *Chinese Views of Future Warfare*. (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press 1998)

<sup>15</sup> *China's National Defense in 2002*, Chapter I, "The Security Situation," paras 2-3.

<sup>16</sup> Susan L. Craig, "Chinese Perceptions of Traditional and Nontraditional Security Threats," (monograph, Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, March 2007), 2-3.

<sup>17</sup> Ted Galen Carpenter, "Staying Alive," *The National Interest*, No. 4, March/April 2008, p. 27.

<sup>18</sup> *Id.* at 27.

<sup>19</sup> Thomas Owens Mackubin, "In Defense of Classical Geopolitics," *Naval War College Review*, Autumn 1999, Vol. LII, No. 4, p. 68.

<sup>20</sup> *Id.* at 68.

<sup>21</sup> Robert H. Scales, Jr. and Larry M. Wortzel, "The Future U.S. Military Presence in Asia: Landpower and the Geostrategy of American Commitment," (monograph, Strategic Studies Institute, May 2002), 2.

<sup>22</sup> Richard Bernstein and Ross H. Munro, *The Coming Conflict with China* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998), 167-169.

<sup>23</sup> *China's National Defense in 1998*.

<sup>24</sup> *Id.*

<sup>25</sup> [www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/ks.html](http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/ks.html). (accessed January 22, 2008).

<sup>26</sup> Susan L. Craig, "Chinese Perceptions of Traditional and Nontraditional Security Threats," (monograph, Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, March 2007), 9.

<sup>27</sup> *China's National Defense in 2002, Chapter I, The Security Situation*, para 7.

<sup>28</sup> Ted Galen Carpenter, "Staying Alive," *The National Interest*, No. 4, March/April 2008, p. 27.

<sup>29</sup> *Id.* at 27.

<sup>30</sup> Richard Bernstein and Ross H. Munro, *The Coming Conflict with China* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998), 188-193.

<sup>31</sup> A previous paper by the author studied the Japanese conquest of Manchuria where the fait accompli was an operational consideration. Renegade military leaders slowed useful communications and the Japanese government stalled immediate decisive actions until Japanese forces eventually ran Chinese nationalists out of Manchuria.

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